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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF STANDARDS
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Anti-Freezing Solutions for Automobile Radiators

At the Bureau of Standards, the freezing points of various solutions have been determined and the corrosive effects of such solutions upon the metals commonly employed in radiator construction have been investigated. Inasmuch as electrolytic action is largely responsible for radiator corrosion, corrosive effects were studied upon the combinations of metals ordinarily used in radiators.

The ideal anti-freezing compound is one that will prevent freezing of the radiator liquid without injuring either engine or radiator, that will not lose its non-freezing properties after continued use and that does not materially change the boiling point of water when dissolved in it.

There are two general types of anti-freezing compounds; one a solution in water of alcohol or glycerine or a mixture of the latter two, the other a solution in water of calcium chloride. Kerosene and similar liquids without admixture and solutions of glucose or honey in water are sometimes used.

Honey

The objections to anti-freezing solutions of honey in water are that low percentage mixtures do not have a sufficiently low freezing point and high percentage mixtures are so viscous that they circulate very slowly or not at all. Freezing of these solutions is not likely to cause bursting as slush begins to form at the freezing point but does not become solid until a temperature several degrees lower is reached. The use of these solutions does not remove the other ill effects of freezing, such as injury to the circulating pump and overheating of the engine due to lack of circulation.



The following table gives the properties of honey-water solutions:

Percentage (by volume) in Water	Freezing Point °C	Freezing Point °F	Density at 21°C g/cc
33 1/3	- 6	+21	1.165
50	-11	+12	1.222
66 2/3	-20	- 4	1.275
75	-26	-15	1.307
100	--	--	1.403

Alcohol, when added to honey-water solutions, lowers the freezing point but may cause the sugar to crystallize out from the honey and thus increase the likelihood of clogging of the water system.

Glucose

Glucose solutions are even less effective than honey. Dextrose is the active component of commercial glucose and no proportion of dextrose and water can be found which freezes at a temperature below 25°F (-5°C). Solutions containing glucose behave like those containing honey in that they freeze very slowly, first to slush and finally solid.

Kerosene

Kerosene should never be used in a cooling system in which the liquid is not circulated by a pump. Its use in any system is undesirable as the inflammability of its vapor makes it dangerous and its high and uncertain boiling point may lead to the serious over-heating of the engine or even to the melting of the solder in the radiator. It also has a slight solvent action on rubber.

Calcium Chloride

Calcium chloride preparations are sold under a variety of names. Their ability to prevent freezing if properly prepared is unquestioned. Solutions of calcium chloride and water are known to have a corrosive action on the engine jacket, on the solder in the radiator, and on aluminum which is sometimes used in manifolds, pumps, and headers. The effect on solder and aluminum is especially serious. Certain calcium chloride preparations contain a small amount of a soluble chromate added for the purpose of retarding this corrosive action. Laboratory tests at this Bureau indicate that such preparations have practically no corrective action on the metals used in the construction of automobile radiators with the exception of aluminum.

Another troublesome effect of all calcium chloride solutions is experienced if the solution comes in contact with spark plugs or ignition wires. The salt deposited when the water evaporates is very difficult to remove and when it cools it absorbs water and becomes a good electrical conductor causing short-circuits which are not easy to locate as they disappear when the engine is heated up.

Alcohol and Glycerine

In general the alcohol solutions are considered the most satisfactory. They do not have any appreciable corrosive action. This can be predicted from theoretical considerations and is well established in practice. Wood alcohol, however, sometimes contains free acid which is objectionable and for this reason should not be used unless it is known to be free from such acids.

The chief objection to alcohol is that it continually boils out of the solution and must be replaced frequently in order to maintain the proper proportion of alcohol. Glycerine is frequently substituted for part of the alcohol to reduce evaporation. The most practical method to maintain the proper quantity of alcohol in the solution is to determine the specific gravity of the liquid by means of an hydrometer and by reference to the appended table add the necessary quantity of alcohol to obtain the desired gravity. Care should be taken to have the solution thoroughly mixed, and as the specific gravities given in the table are obtained at 60°F, the specific gravity should be measured when the temperature of the

solution is between 55°F and 65°F. The solution may then be kept at the proper strength from day to day by adding alcohol until the hydrometer reads the same as when first noted.

In order to illustrate how a non-freezing solution is prepared by using the table, assume that the lowest temperature anticipated is 19 degrees above zero Fahrenheit and that denatured alcohol is to be used.

By reference to the table in the line marked "Denatured Alcohol", +19°F is found in the 20% column, and the specific gravity of that solution is 0.978.

If the radiator holds 3.5 gallons, 20% of this must be alcohol and the remaining 80% water; 20% of 3.5 gallons is 0.7 gallon or a little more than 5.5 pints. This should be added to enough water to make 3.5 gallons, i.e., the water used will be 2.8 gallons, a little more than 11 quarts.

If the temperature of this solution is brought to 60°F and an accurate hydrometer is floated in it, the hydrometer should read 0.978. If the reading is higher than 0.978, more alcohol should be added with constant stirring until the 0.978 mark is reached. (An accurate hydrometer should read 1.000 when placed in water at 60°F and 0.834 in 180° proof alcohol at the same temperature. The denatured alcohol usually sold by dealers is 180° proof, which is the minimum allowed by law.)

A solution so prepared will not begin to freeze until its temperature is approximately +19°F.

The appended table of freezing points was obtained from actual measurements made at the Bureau of Standards, on solutions of commercial materials, which may be considered sufficiently accurate for practical purposes, since they agree fairly well with the most reliable scientific data.

The freezing point is taken to be that temperature in the cooling process at which crystals begin to form. The temperature at which the entire mass becomes solid may be several degrees lower than the freezing point of dilute solutions, and ten to fifteen degrees lower for the more concentrated solutions.

As an example, a 30% solution of denatured alcohol begins to freeze, that is, small crystals of ice form, at 7°F, but the solution does not freeze solid until a temperature of -5°F or lower is reached. Hence, a temperature considerably lower than that given in the table for any given per-

centage of alcohol would not injure the engine or radiator. However, it seems desirable to keep the solution at such a concentration that ice crystals will not form at the lowest temperature to be encountered, since such crystals may interfere with circulation.

Table giving the freezing points and specific gravities of some alcohol and glycerine anti-freezing solutions

Percentage (by volume) in water and freezing points.

Solution	10%		20%		30%		40%		50%	
	°C	°F	°C	°F	°C	°F	°C	°F	°C	°F
Denatured alcohol	-3 (0.988)	+27	-7 (0.978)	+19	-12 (0.968)	+10	-19 (0.957)	-2	-28 (0.943)	-18
Wood alcohol	-5 (0.987)	+23	-12 (0.975)	+10	-19 (0.963)	-2	-29 (0.952)	-20	-40 (0.937)	-40
Glycerine Sp. Gr., 1.2537)	-2	+29	-6	+21	-11	+12	-18	0	-26	-15
Denatured alcohol & glycerine*	-4	+25	-8	+18	-13	+9	-22	-8	-33	-26
Wood alcohol and glycerine*	-4	+25	-9	+16	-15	+5	-24	-11	-35	-31

*Glycerine and alcohol are mixed in equal proportions. Ten per cent glycerine and denatured alcohol means 5 parts glycerine and 5 parts alcohol should be added to 90 parts of water.

Method of Reading a Hydrometer

The solution is placed in a clear glass jar or cylinder and the hydrometer carefully immersed in it to a point slightly below that to which it naturally sinks, and is then allowed to float freely.



In taking the reading the eye should be placed slightly below the plane of the surface of the liquid and then raised slowly until this surface, seen as an ellipse, becomes a straight line. The point at which this line cuts the hydrometer scale should be taken as the reading of the instrument. (An accurate hydrometer should read 1.000 when placed in water at 60°F and 0.834 in 180° proof alcohol at the same temperature. The denatured alcohol usually sold by dealers is 180° proof, which is the minimum allowed by law.)

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